DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 197 330 CS 005 871

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TITLE A Contrast of Three Approaches to Vocabulary Study for College Students.
PUB DATE Nov 80
NOTE 6p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Southeastern Regional Conference of the International Reading Association (6th, Norfolk, VA, November 12-15, 1980).

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS College Students; *Comparative Analysis; Context Clues; *Grade Point Average; Higher Education; *Reading Achievement; Reading Research; *Teaching Methods; *Vocabulary Development; *Vocabulary Skills; Word Study Skills

ABSTRACT

Based on college students' grade point averages (GPA) and their scores on the Nelson-Denny Reading Tests and the Joy Combining Forms Test, a multiple classification analysis of variance was performed to determine the effects of three different methods of vocabulary instruction on student achievement in a reading and study skills course. The approaches were a highly structured vocabulary study with emphasis on Greek and Latin combining forms (prefixes, roots, and suffixes), a less structured method, and limited attention to contextual meanings of words as they occurred in reading materials. Results revealed that "above average GPA" students did significantly better than "below average GPA" students on both measures. There was no interaction of method and GPA class on either set of scores obtained. The direct, frequent, and highly structured instruction in vocabulary produced higher scores on the Joy Combining Forms Test. There was, however, no difference in scores on the vocabulary section of the Nelson-Denny Reading Test, and vocabulary performance could not be attributed to teaching method. It appears, then, that teachers who consider combining forms to be important vocabulary tools should try using highly structured vocabulary teaching methods for remedial college students. (RL)

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A CONTRAST OF THREE APPROACHES TO VOCABULARY STUDY FOR COLLEGE STUDENTS

by
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Various approaches have been used to aid in developing vocabulary skills for students of all grade levels. This study contrasts approaches to teaching vocabulary skills to college students.

Three groups of college students were taught Reading 1000 (an elective course in reading and study skills improvement) with distinctly different vocabulary teaching methods. The first approach involved highly structured vocabulary study with emphasis on Greek and Latin combining forms (prefixes, roots, and suffixes). The 60 combining forms selected for this study were those which had frequent occurrence in our language--but whose actual meanings were least likely known by literate adults. For example, -auto- (meaning self) was included because of its high frequency in words--and because, when asked its meaning, many inappropriately respond "car." Those combining forms of high frequency (such as re-, pre-, non-, or un-) were not included in the concentrated study because of their familiarity by most readers of this age. Classroom exercises were prepared using these 60 combining forms in hundreds of words in various meaningful contexts for college students. The primary emphasis was to encourage the reader to internalize the meanings of these combining forms in order to be able to determine more appropriately the meanings of the thousands of additional words in which they occur. Approximately two hours of in-class instruction were spent each week with this combining forms vocabulary study.

A second group studied vocabulary in a less structured manner, also spending approximately two hours per week of in-class time. This approach was characterized by its lack of formal combining form study. Words were discussed as they were used in class or as they were encountered in reading situations. A third group

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did no vocabulary study other than very limited attention to contextual meanings of words as they occurred in reading material. These groups were taught by five instructors in the Spring of 1979.

The investigators questioned whether these three distinct methods of vocabulary instruction contributed to significantly different scores on the vocabulary section of the Nelson-Denny Reading Test (1960). A second measure, the Joy Combining Forms Test (1979), was administered to the entire sample. This test consists of 30 multiple choice items. The question stem is a pseudo-word comprised of two of the combining forms included in the study. The reader selects its "meaning" from five choices which include the following: a correct answer, an answer with an appropriate meaning for the first combining form but not the second, an answer with an appropriate meaning for the second combining form but not the first, a distractor which might seem plausible to the uninformed, and a distractor which is not plausible for some reason. The following is an example:

UNIGENIC means	
a. having a single color	(answer includes appropriate meaning of uni- but not of -gen-)
b. a type of mind stimulus in psychological experimentations	(distractor--plausible)
c. having a variety of beginnings	(answer includes appropriate meaning of -gen- but not of -uni-)
d. one who writes special projects	(distractor--not plausible because the -ic suffix does not fit definitions beginning with "one who")
e. having only one origin	(correct answer)

The rationale for this measure was based on the widely accepted premise that combining forms comprise a large portion of usable vocabulary; and students' abilities in recognizing these forms may contribute to better achievement in college coursework. Therefore, another question implicit in the study was whether method affected significantly scores on the Joy Combining Forms Test.

Also of interest was whether students' grade point averages interacted in any significant way with the performance under the three varieties of vocabulary teaching techniques. Nelson-Denny and Joy Combining Forms Test scores were obtained at the end of the quarter for the three sets of subjects. Grade-point average (GPA) data were secured for each subject so that the total sample of 117 students could be classified as "above average GPA," "average GPA," or "below average GPA." In order to determine ranges for these classifications, a high-to-low GPA ranking was made; the group was then divided into thirds. This was done in terms of the sample rather than the entire school population's standards of high, average, and below average because it was assumed that the group was representative of those students taking Reading 1000. Therefore, data gathered would be helpful in determining direction in teaching those students only.

In order to test the null hypotheses 1) that there were no significant achievement differences between students taught by the three vocabulary teaching methods, and 2) that there was no significant interaction of grade point average and vocabulary teaching method on achievement, a multiple classification analysis of variance was performed.

A strong method effect was demonstrated on the Joy Combining Forms Test for students taught by the highly structured vocabulary. (See Table 1.) There was no significant difference in scores of the other two groups according to a Newman Kuels Range Test. On the Nelson Denny, there was no significant difference in method groups' performance. (See Table 2.) There was a highly significant difference in scores on the Joy Combining Forms Test depending upon the GPA group to which students belonged. This finding was consistent on Nelson Denny scores also. A Newman-Kuels Range Test was applied to the data to learn more about the differences in means. Results revealed that "above average GPA" students did significantly better than did "below average GPA" students on both measures.

Table 1

Joy Combining Forms Test scores X Method X GPA classifications

Source	df	SS	MS	F ratio	p
Method	2	1330.581	665.291	27.158	0.001
GPA classification	2	425.760	212.880	8.690	0.001
Interaction	4	50.444	12.611	0.515	n.s.

Table 2

Nelson Denny Scores X Method X GPA Class

Source	df	SS	MS	F ratio	p
Method	2	210.821	105.410	0.641	n.s.
GPA Class	2	2444.974	1222.487	7.438	0.001
Interaction	4	674.666	168.667	1.026	n.s.

The results of the data analysis revealed several points of interest. There was no interaction of method and GPA class on either set of scores obtained. This finding seems to indicate that no group scored higher or lower due to the combining of effects in the study. The direct, frequent, and highly structured instruction in vocabulary yielded higher scores on a measure designed to test knowledge of combining forms. Those students who did not receive the highly structured vocabulary instruction scored significantly lower. This finding may indicate that the instructional method was successful in teaching combining forms. There was, however, no difference in scores on the vocabulary section of the Nelson Denny, and vocabulary performance could not be attributed to teaching method. Therefore, if one supports the position (as have Brown, 1964; Brownstein and Weiner, 1975; Davis, 1969; Doyle & Mittwer, 1969; Gayle, 1966; Jones, 1964; Lewis, 1971) that combining forms are important vocabulary tools, then perhaps a highly structured vocabulary teaching method is advisable for remedial college students.

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